

November 9, 2011 | by USCIRF

WASHINGTON, D.C. - A new study sponsored by the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and conducted by the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD) found that Pakistan's public schools and madrassas negatively portray the country's religious minorities and reinforce biases which fuel acts of discrimination, and possibly violence, against these communities.

"This study – the first-ever study of its kind -- documents how Pakistan's public schools and privately-run madrassas are not teaching tolerance but are exacerbating religious differences," said [Leonard Leo](#), USCIRF chair. "Education reform incorporating religious tolerance is critical to the development of a society that values human rights, including religious freedom, for all its citizens. Teaching discrimination increases the likelihood that violent religious extremism in Pakistan will continue to grow, weakening religious freedom, national and regional stability, and global security."

Titled "Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan," the study involved the examination of social studies, Islamic studies, and Urdu textbooks and pedagogical methods in Pakistan's public school system and its madrasa system, and the interviewing of teachers and students about their views on religious minorities. The goal of the year-long study was to explore linkages between the portrayal of religious minorities in public schools and madrassas, biases that exist against these minorities, and subsequent acts of discrimination or

extremist violence.

The study found that –

- Public school textbooks used by all children often had a strong Islamic orientation, and Pakistan's religious minorities were referenced derogatorily or omitted altogether;
- Hindus were depicted in especially negative terms, and references to Christians were often inaccurate and offensive;
- Public school and madrassa teachers had limited awareness or understanding of religious minorities and their beliefs, and were divided on whether religious minorities were citizens;
- Teachers often expressed very negative views about Ahmadis, Christians, and Jews, and successfully transmitted these biases to their students;
- Interviewees' expressions of tolerance often were intermixed with neutral and intolerant comments, leaving some room for improvement .

ICRD and its partner, the independent Pakistani think tank Sustainable Development Policy Institute , reviewed more than 100 textbooks from grades 1 through 10 from Pakistan's four provinces. Students and teachers from public schools and madrassas were also interviewed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province), Balochistan, Sindh, and Punjab. Thirty-seven middle and high schools were visited, with 277 students and teachers interviewed individually or in group settings. Researchers interviewed 226 madrassa students and teachers from 19 madrassas.

[CLICK HERE TO READ REPORT](#)

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent, bipartisan U.S. government commission separate from the State Department, has actively monitored the rise across Pakistan of violent religious extremism that targets religious minorities as well as members of the Muslim majority. USCIRF has concluded that promoting respect for freedom of religion or belief must be an integral part of advancing regional security in South Asia. The conflict with violent religious extremists in Pakistan requires the United States to understand the roots of this extremism and actively bolster those who respect democratic values, the rule of law, and international standards of human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. Education reform is a key part of this effort.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at tcarter@uscirf.gov or (202) 523-3257.